

The Whole School Approach Scouting Program for Character Development: The Bhutanese Scout Leaders and Parents' Perspectives

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Abstract

This study explored the perspectives of Bhutanese Scout Leaders (BSLs) and parents on the roles and effectiveness of the WSAS Program in promoting character development among scouts in Paro district, Bhutan. Rooted in Bhutanese holistic education and Gross National Happiness (GNH) principles, the program aims to cultivate character traits such as self-discipline, teamwork, responsibility, integrity, loyalty, and resilience. Using a mixed-methods design, quantitative data were collected from 324 respondents via survey questionnaires, and qualitative insights from 46 interviewees through semi-structured interviews. The instruments were validated by five experts using the Item Objective Congruence (IOC) method (score +1). Reliability was assessed through a pilot study, which yielded excellent internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.99. Findings indicated a strong stakeholders' consensus on the program's positive impact, with parents and administrators reporting a highest level of agreement. Qualitative data emphasized the importance of culturally embedded practices and experiential learning in promoting ethical behavior, social responsibility, and emotional development. Despite challenges such as resource constraints and inconsistent implementation, the WSAS Program was recognized as an effective model for character education. The study recommended greater investment in leadership, resources, and collaboration to ensure sustainability.

Keywords: Whole school approach scouting program, Character development, Bhutanese scout leaders, Scouts, Parents, Perspectives

Introduction

Education has been recognized as a key response to the global concern over the decline in youth character (Soetopo, 2016). Latham (2020, as cited in Subaidi et al., 2023) stated that education plays a vital role in shaping children's character and personal competencies, both within and beyond formal classroom settings. Therefore, character education must be embedded as a core component of educational practice, with a focus on cultivating positive attributes necessary to meet the challenges of today's society. Schools, as key institutions for nurturing child development, need to be strategically positioned to implement programs that promote character development and instil essential values.

The Planning Commission, Royal Government of Bhutan (n.d.) emphasizes a holistic approach to education, envisioning a system that promotes Bhutanese cultural values alongside universal principles to enhance children's capacities. It calls for nurturing knowledgeable, skilled, creative, and confident citizens able to address global challenges while preserving Bhutan's traditions. Recognizing its central role in national progress, the Royal Government of Bhutan regards education as a cornerstone of development, contributing to the nation's social, economic, cultural, intellectual, and environmental advancement, and shaping its identity as a peaceful, progressive, and happy nation (REC, 2014).

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan, Article 9, Section 15, states, “*The State shall endeavor to provide education for the purpose of improving and increasing knowledge, values and skills of the entire population with education being directed towards the full development of the human personality*” (Royal Government of Bhutan [RGoB], 2008). Therefore, the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoE&SD) of Bhutan plays a pivotal role in producing children who value Bhutan’s unique national identity, ancient wisdom and culture, embracing the right livelihood. Further, according to Tobgye (n.d.), education should promote civic duties and social upliftment, develop character, promote culture, impart value education, inculcate discipline, and provide holistic development as stated in the constitution.

The Royal Kasho (Decree) on Education Reform, issued during the 113th National Day at Punakha district in 2020, envisions a Bhutanese education system that prioritizes character development, equipping children with essential 21st-century skills while promoting holistic development and a deep-rooted Bhutanese identity shaped by the nation’s history, culture, traditions, and values (RGoB, 2020).

Further, according to the Bhutan Scouts Association (BSA), childhood is a foundational phase in an individual’s life, where they begin to grow into youth and adulthood. The environment and activities surrounding them play a significant role in developing their character; thus, engaging them meaningfully during this period is essential for their development (Bhutan Scouts Association [BSA], 2021b).

Therefore, recognizing these crucial roles, the MoE&SD of Bhutan focuses on equipping young learners with right values and skills that promote usefulness, grace, and lifelong learning through formal, non-formal, and informal education, enabling their meaningful participation in society. The school-based scouting program, introduced as part of this mandate, was designed to prepare scouts to become responsible and productive youth (BSA, 2019). Scouting provides experiential learning that enhances understanding of the world and supports them to develop into responsible citizens of tomorrow. Subaidi et al. (2023) further highlight scouting’s transformative role, noting that when aligned with educational goals, it effectively cultivates ethical values and life skills, thereby

contributing to holistic personal and social development. With its principles and methods, scouting offers significant potential for ministries of education globally in promoting character and values among learners.

The scouting movement, founded by Robert Stephenson Baden-Powell (B.P.) in 1907, originated from his military experiences, which emphasized practical resourcefulness. His manual *Aids to Scouting*, initially intended for soldiers, gained popularity among educators and inspired the first experimental boys’ camp at Brownsea Island, followed by the publication of *Scouting for Boys*, leading to rapid global expansion, including the establishment of a girls’ organization in 1909 (HOS, 2003). Since then, scouting has become one of the world’s largest youth movements, promoting brotherhood, character development, and holistic growth (Wangchuk & Tshering, 2021). The first World Scout Jamboree in 1920 recognized Baden-Powell as Chief Scout of the World, and the World Organization of the Scout Movement (WOSM) was founded in 1922; it now operates in over 216 countries and territories (BSA, 2021a). Through the Scout Promise and Laws, the movement guides youth toward becoming responsible citizens with the promotion of holistic development (Tshewang & Duba, 2023).

The scouting program in Bhutan existed informally since the 1980s and was formally institutionalized in 1996 under the leadership of His Majesty the Fourth King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, who emphasized youth development as key to the nation’s future. This led to the establishment of the Bhutan Scouts Association (BSA) under the Youth Guidance and Counseling Division (YGCD) of the Ministry of Health and Education, to promote value-based education and character development (BSA, 2019, 2021c; Wangchuk & Tenzin, 2021; Tenzin & Wangchuk, 2022). Bhutan became a member of the WOSM in 1999 during the 35th World Scout Conference in Durban, South Africa (Tshering & Jamtsho, 2020). Since then, the program has evolved from sporadic youth camps into a structured co-curricular program integrated within the national education system, focusing on holistic development aligned with Bhutanese educational values (Tshering & Jamtsho, 2021; Wangchuk & Tenzin, 2021). Despite its formal establishment, the scouting program in Bhutan

initially struggled to gain full momentum. In response, it was revitalized in 2013 under the Royal Command of His Majesty, the King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, to promote character development and steer youth away from harmful behaviors (Wangchuk & Tenzin, 2021; Tenzin & Wangchuk, 2022). His Majesty's presence as Patron has significantly enhanced the program's credibility and also aligned it with national development goals and community engagement efforts (World Organization of the Scout Movement, 2015; Wangchuk & Tenzin, 2021). Since then, various initiatives have been launched to address youth challenges and reinforce core Bhutanese values such as *tha-damtshig* (sacred commitment or patriotism) and *ley-jumdrye* (the principle that good actions lead to good outcomes), promoting unity and moral responsibility among scouts (Wangyal, 2001, p.107).

The scouting program in Bhutan operates through a structured, multi-tiered administrative framework at the national, district, and school levels to ensure effective implementation and coordination (BSA, 2019, 2021c; Gurung et al., 2020). At the national level, the BSA formulates policies, delivers training, and aligns scouting with national educational goals, while coordinating with government and international partners. District Education Offices act as intermediaries, supporting school-level implementation and organizing training for BSLs. At the school level, Principals, Vice Principals, teachers, and support staff with a minimum level of Basic Unit Leaders' Training (BULT) or equivalent manage daily scouting activities and ensure the program's continuity. Scouts are engaged in leadership, life skills, environmental education, and personal development training. As a core educational co-curricular program, scouting spans from Pre-Primary to university levels and extends into communities, structured into five categories: Chechey, Nachung, Nazhoen, Rovers, and Community-Based Scouts (CBS) to address age-specific developmental needs (BSA, 2021d).

Recognizing the broad benefits of scouting, the Royal Education Council (REC, 2014) emphasized the need to enhance and expand the national scouting program as a key strategy in its Education Blueprint 2014-2024 to promote GNH-based education. The goal was to promote character development by integrating indigenous wisdom, global competencies, and values-

based learning. In alignment, the School Performance Management System (SPMS) guidelines (Education Monitoring Division, 2022) included the scouting program as a monitored component, allocating 2 out of 15 points under the domain of other educational programs to support scouting as the Whole School Approach. Following the resolutions from the 6th and 7th Scouts General Assemblies, the Policy and Planning Division mandated phase-wise implementation of the Whole School Approach Scouting (WSAS) Program, starting with primary schools in 2022, with secondary schools given discretionary participation (Policy and Planning Division [PPD], 2020, 2022). But notably, Paro district pioneered full-scale WSAS Program implementation across all school levels, becoming the first district in Bhutan to do so (Bhutan Scouts Network, 2021).

The WSAS Program in Bhutan is a value-based educational initiative aimed at promoting holistic development and character formation among scouts with the support of the entire school community (PPD, 2022). By integrating the WSAS Program as a co-curricular program, the program promotes inclusive participation and instils key character values aligning closely with Bhutan's GNH-based education philosophy (Wangchuk & Tenzin, 2021; Tenzin & Wangchuk, 2022; Kaka, Miller, & Rizk, 2022). Although the WSAS Program is embedded within national education policies, no studies in Bhutan have specifically explored BSLs' perspectives on its implementation and outcomes. Since BSLs play key roles as mentors and facilitators, their insights are essential for understanding the program's effectiveness and challenges. Leadership perspectives, as emphasized by Smith and Rohleder (2020), provide practical insights that can strengthen program delivery and outcomes. On the other hand, including parents in the study provides a broader and balanced perspective on scouts' character development, as they observe their children in diverse contexts beyond scouting. While international and some local studies have highlighted teachers' and school administrators' contributions, parents who played a critical role in reinforcing values at home remained underexplored, raising questions about how they perceive the program's impact. Thus, parents were included to complement and validate findings from BSLs. Their perspectives enhanced the credibility and generalizability of the

results and were recognized as essential stakeholders in sustaining the WSAS Program and promoting holistic character education.

Despite rising scout enrollment, dropout rates remain high at higher education levels, due to limited support from non-scout educators and stakeholders (Wangchuk & Tenzin, 2021; Wangchuk & Tshering, 2021; Tenzin & Wangchuk, 2022). So this study will provide empirical evidence on the WSAS Program's role and effectiveness in character development to inform policymakers, educators, and stakeholders. Paro, the first district to implement the WSAS Program across all school levels in 2022 (BSN, 2021), offers a critical case. Yet, nearly three years on, no formal study has been conducted, making it timely to assess its impact to guide evidence-based expansion at the national level.

Research objectives

1. To find out the BSLs and parents' perspectives on the roles of the WSAS Program in promoting the character development of scouts in Bhutanese schools.
2. To investigate the BSLs and parents' perspectives on the effectiveness of the WSAS Program in promoting the character development of scouts in Bhutanese schools.

Research questions

1. What were the BSLs and parents' perspectives towards the role of the WSAS Program in promoting the character development of scouts in Bhutanese schools?
2. What were the BSLs and parents' perspectives on the effectiveness of the WSAS Program in promoting the character development of scouts in Bhutanese schools?

Limitations of the study

1. The study employed a mixed-methods design, but no inferential statistical tests, such as the *t*-test, were applied. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively to capture participants' perceptions of the WSAS program, with qualitative findings complementing these results. Though the study provided valuable insights into the program's perceived effectiveness, the findings cannot be generalized with statistical confidence or used to identify statistically significant differences across groups.

2. The data collected through questionnaires and semi-structured face-to-face open-ended interviews were confined to BSLs and parents from a sampled district in western Bhutan. Thus, the findings should not be broadly generalized.

3. The Scouting program emphasized the holistic development of scouts, namely physical, intellectual, social, spiritual, emotional, and character development; however, the study narrowed its focus to character development. Therefore, the results should not be extrapolated to other developmental dimensions.

4. The study focused solely on BSLs and parents' perspectives on the roles and effectiveness of the WSAS Program on specific character development traits: self-discipline, teamwork, responsibility, integrity, loyalty, and resilience. Therefore, the findings should not be extended to other aspects of character development.

5. The scope of respondents could have been expanded to relevant stakeholders such as officials from the BSA, District Education Offices, and the scouts themselves. Including these groups would have helped verify the perspectives of BSLs and parents, thereby strengthening the reliability of the findings. However, it was confined to BSLs and parents only due to time constraints.

Conceptual framework of the study

The principal data for this study were obtained from BSLs and parents in school communities across the Paro district. The data collection involved onsite survey and semi-structured interviews.

Variables

The researcher used independent and dependent variables to investigate the BSLs and parents' perspectives on the roles and effectiveness of the WSAS Program on character development among scouts in Bhutanese schools. Figure 2 presents a graphic representation of the independent and dependent variables:

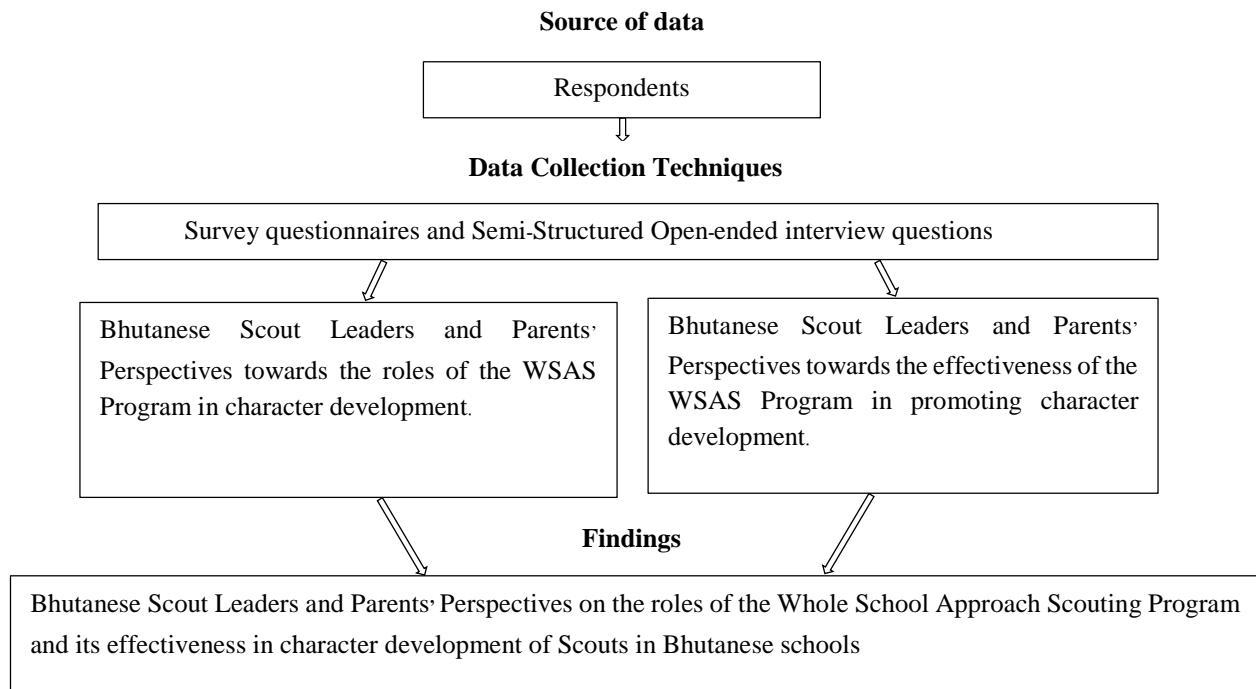


Figure 1 Representation of the conceptual framework

Source: Adapted from Dorji and Sakulwongs (2022)

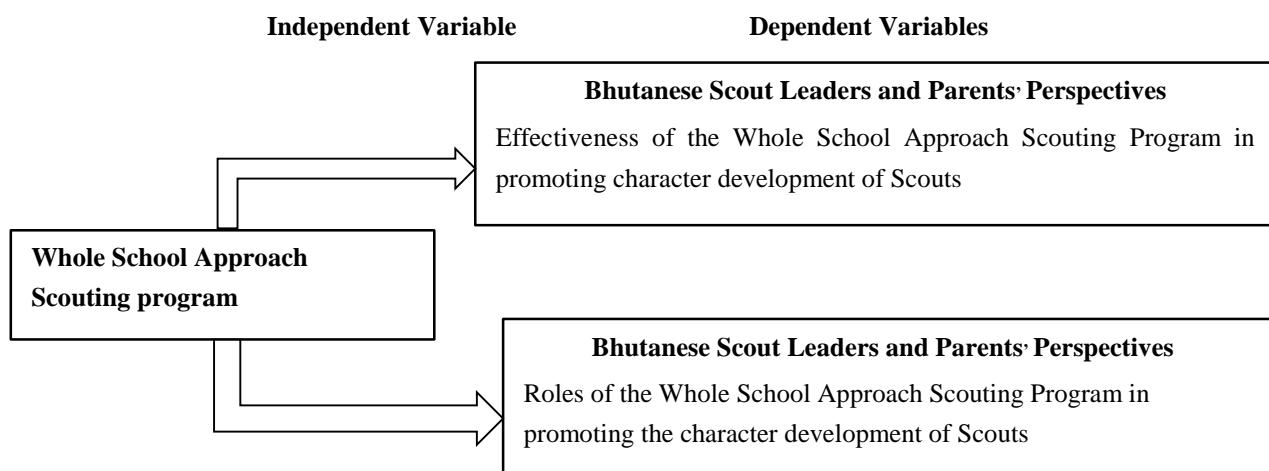


Figure 2 Independent and dependent variables

Source: Adapted from Dorji and Sakulwongs (2022)

Bhutanese education system

Before the emergence of modern education, Bhutan relied primarily on monastic education. The foundation for modern education was laid in 1914 when Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck, the first King of Bhutan, sent 46 boys to India for Western education and established the first modern school in Haa through Gongzin Ugyen Dorji (Gyeltshen & Zangmo, 2020).

However, a structured modern education system emerged only with the First Five-Year Plan in 1961, significantly contributing to Bhutan's socio-economic, political, cultural, and intellectual development. Education remains central to Bhutan's nation-building efforts, promoting holistic development and reinforcing its identity as a peaceful and progressive nation. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan mandates free

basic education and access to higher education based on merit (RGoB, 2008). The Bhutanese education system aims to provide quality, contextually relevant learning supported by strong infrastructure, effective pedagogy, and skilled educators, aiming to produce responsible citizens who contribute to national development (REC, 2014).

Bhutanese school education system offers 13 years of free education, comprising 7 years of primary (Pre-Primary to Grade VI), 2 years of lower secondary (Grades VII–VIII), 2 years of middle secondary (Grades IX–X), and 2 years of higher secondary education (Grades XI–XII). English is the primary medium of instruction, with Dzongkha (Bhutan's national language) as a compulsory subject, whereas monastic education uses Dzongkha as the main medium (Wangmo & Brooks, 2011).

The curriculum focuses on core academic subjects, alongside vocational, cultural, and moral education aimed at holistic development. However, youth-related issues persist, indicating gaps in the system's ability to fully prepare children for future challenges. In response, the WSAS Program has been identified as a vital co-curricular program promoting character and holistic development (Gurung et al., 2020; Wangchuk & Tenzin, 2021; Tenzin & Wangchuk, 2022; Kaka, Miller, & Rizk, 2022).

Scouting movement

The Scouting Movement was the largest global youth program, aimed at promoting value-based education through the Scout Promise and Laws. Its vision was to empower youth to become responsible citizens and positive agents of change (World Scout Bureau [WSB], 2008). Scouting promotes holistic development, like physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual, while also cultivating personal responsibility and global citizenship. It is grounded in three core principles: duty to God, duty to others, and self-development (WSB, 2019). Scout leaders are essential to the movement's success, as facilitators who guide youth through age-appropriate decision-making and personal development within a supportive environment (WSB, 2018).

World Organization of the Scout Movement (WOSM)

The World Organization of the Scout Movement (WOSM), a non-governmental organization that oversees most National Scout Organisations, was founded in 1922 and is headquartered in Geneva, with the Secretary General's office located in Kuala Lumpur. It operates through six regional offices: Africa, Arab, Asia-Pacific, European, Interamerican, and Eurasian (Global Support Centre [GSC], 2024). As of July 2024, WOSM comprises over 57 million members across 216 countries and territories, with a majority in developing nations (GSC, 2024). Its mission is to educate youth through a values-based system rooted in the Scout Promise and Laws, promoting self-fulfillment and constructive societal engagement (WOSM, 2023).

Scouting in Bhutan

The scouting program in Bhutan is a school-based co-curricular program overseen by the BSA, under the Scouts and Sports Division of the MoE&SD. The program is structured into five sections: CheyChey (PP–III), Nachung (IV–VI), Nazhoen (VII–XII), Rover (for tertiary students), and Community-Based Scouting (for out-of-school youth and adults who want to continue scouting as lifelong learning). The school system engages the first three sections. These sections promote personal development, character, citizenship, leadership, and community service (BSA, 2019, 2021c). BSLs, comprising Principals, teachers, and supporting staff with a minimum of Basic Unit Leaders' Training (BULT) or equivalent in scouting, implement the program (BSA, 2019).

Whole School Approach Scouting Program (WSAS)

The WSAS Program systematically integrates scouting as a school-wide initiative aimed at promoting equitable and holistic development among all children, regardless of grade or voluntarism (Hamidah et al., 2021; WOSM, 2020). Unlike general scouting, WSAS involves every child as a scout and all school staff as Scout leaders. It emphasizes character education, leadership, social responsibility, and academic growth. The program also engages parents through regular communication about scouting activities, goals, and children's progress. Further, parents are engaged

through participation in scouting events and reinforcing scouting values at home, thereby promoting a strong school-parent partnership in support of youth development.

Relationship between WSAS program and character development

The WSAS Program plays an important role in promoting character development by promoting moral values, social responsibility, and holistic development. As a structured co-curricular program, it cultivates core character traits through experiential learning and community engagement (Demir, 2019). Grounded in character education theories that integrate cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains, the program also supports lifelong personality development influenced by social contexts beyond the family (Boeree, 2006; Yazgan İnanç & Yerlikaya, 2013, as cited in Demir, 2019). By embedding scouting across the school, WSAS reinforces national identity and civic responsibility (Hamidah et al., 2021). It enhances social development by encouraging collaboration, leadership, and empathy through peer and adult interaction, positioning scouting as a key contributor to character development in schools (Hamidah et al., 2021).

Related studies

Globally, scouting is widely recognized as a leading youth development platform. Gurung et al. (2020) emphasized its contribution to life skills, while Yezer and Schmidt (2016) documented its introduction in Bhutan in 1996 and the subsequent establishment of the BSA. Initial challenges in Bhutan included limited awareness and a lack of trained Scout leaders. Nevertheless, national studies validate the program's influence on youth development. For instance, Wangchuk and Tshering (2021) found that scouting enhanced self-identity, motivation, and community involvement, with scouts outperforming peers academically. Similarly, Wangchuk (2018, as cited in Gurung et al., 2020) reported that active participation in scouting promoted social responsibility and academic improvement. Tshewang and Duba (2023) affirmed scouting's alignment with the nation's GNH philosophy, finding that WSAS Program implementation effectively promoted values across all nine GNH domains. These findings validated the WSAS

Program as a strategic approach for embedding character education within Bhutan's education system. International studies also corroborate the above findings. In Indonesia, Pratomo and Wijayanti (2020) stated that scouting promotes civic competence through knowledge, skills, and character development, while Ilmi et al. (2024) found that the WSAS program cultivated character education. Nugraha et al. (2023) developed a character-building module through the WSAS framework, emphasizing scouting's role in addressing children's behavioral issues and promoting structured character development.

Research methodology

Research design

A mixed-methods approach facilitates the integration of both quantitative and qualitative research within a single study (Shorten & Smith, 2017). Combining these two data types enhances the validity of the findings by incorporating diverse perspectives and facilitating a more comprehensive interpretation (McKim, 2017). Therefore, this study employed a mixed-methods design to explore the perspectives of BSLs and parents in the Paro district regarding the role and effectiveness of the WSAS Program in promoting the character development of scouts in Bhutanese schools. Quantitative data were collected through survey questionnaires, while qualitative data through semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data, followed by interpretation to address the research questions.

Population and sample of the study

The study population comprised 760 BSLs, including administrators, teachers, and support staff involved in implementing the WSAS Program. Using Yamane's 1973 formula with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, 262 BSLs were selected as the sample population of the study (Uakarn et al., 2021). In addition, 62 parents of scouts were selected through convenience sampling to triangulate the findings from BSLs. This brought survey respondents to 324, comprising administrators (n = 30), teachers (n = 149), support staff (n = 83), and parents (n = 62). The sample size calculation for BSLs was as shown below:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

which

n = Number of sample size

N = Total number of population

e = Acceptable Error value (Set equal to 0.05)

$$n = \frac{760}{1+760(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{760}{2.9}$$

$$n = 262$$

For the semi-structured interviews, 46 respondents, including 11 administrators, 12 teachers, 12 support staff, and 11 parents, were selected based on the convenience sampling method. Their direct involvement in or close connection to the WSAS Program provided rich experiential insights relevant to the study's objectives.

Research instrument

Quantitative method

Survey questionnaires were used to gather the perspectives of BSLs and parents in the Paro district on

the role and effectiveness of the WSAS Program in promoting the character development of scouts in Bhutanese schools. Employing a questionnaire is an efficient data collection method, as it allows for flexible question design and structure to align with research objectives and the characteristics of the target group (Boynton & Greenhalgh, 2004, as cited in Denkar & Sakulwongs, 2019). Furthermore, as mentioned by Rowley (2014), surveys enable the collection of data from a large population within a limited timeframe, enhancing the generalizability of the study's findings. The study adopted the Parents Perception Survey Questionnaire format (Rai & Boonprasitt, 2018) and the Scout Experience Survey Questionnaire format (Scout, 2019). Both survey formats were originally designed to capture the perspectives of relevant stakeholders on the effectiveness of their respective programs, which closely aligned with the objectives of this study.

The survey questionnaires were distributed on-site. A total of 30 questionnaire items were structured around the aspects of the WSAS Program in promoting the six characters development traits: self-discipline, teamwork, responsibility, integrity, loyalty and resilience. The respondents marked their responses based on the five-point Likert scale as shown below:

Table 1 Interpretation of likert scale

| Bhutanese Scout Leaders and Parents' perspective level | Scores |
|--|--------|
| Strongly agree (SA) | 5 |
| Agree (A) | 4 |
| Neutral (N) | 3 |
| Disagree (D) | 2 |
| Strongly Disagree | 1 |

Source: Adapted from Denkar and Sakulwongs (2019)

Qualitative method

Semi-structured interviews were considered as flexible as the researcher can prepare a set of questions to obtain specific data with a focus on the research objectives while also seeking in-depth information from the interviewees as per their experiences in the particular area (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, as cited in Denkar & Sakulwongs, 2019). It allows the researcher to structure the questions and probe in detail according

to the response, allowing the interviewees to share their opinions freely (Edwards & Holland, 2013, as cited in Denkar & Sakulwongs, 2019). Thus, qualitative data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face at a location mutually agreed upon by both parties. 35 BSLs and 11 Parents of scouts from 20 schools in Paro district participated in the interviews. The interview consisted

of six open-ended questions to further validate and supplement the findings derived from the surveys.

Data collection procedure

The process of data collection is a structured approach to obtaining data or information by adhering to ethical standards and relevant guidelines that support the integrity and reliability of the study (Elmusharaf, 2012, as cited in Fang & Chalermirundorn, 2019).

Ethical consideration

According to Mohajan (2017), ethics is an essential component of any research. To ensure that research is carried out correctly, ethical issues are of the utmost importance for researchers carrying out educational research (Basit, 2010, as cited in Namgay & Sakulwongs, 2024). Therefore, to conduct this study, ethical approval was obtained from the Research and Development Institute of Rangsit University and the Ministry of Education and Skills Development, Bhutan (Ref. No. MoE&SD/DSE/SLCD/05/2024-25/2279). Before data collection, the researcher also secured consent from the District Education Officer, participating school Principals, and all respondents after clearly explaining the study's purpose.

Confidentiality

The anonymity of the research respondents and the confidentiality of their perspectives were maintained by the researcher. The researcher used codes to indicate the respondents (A1,2; T1,2; SS1,2; P1,2...). Interviews were recorded anonymously, and the recordings and other information were destroyed as soon as the research was completed.

Validity

According to Singh (2017), validity refers to the extent to which an instrument accurately measures what it is intended to measure. It demonstrates how effectively an instrument aligns with the objectives of a particular study. The validity, along with reliability, is essential for conducting rigorous and credible research, as it forms the foundation of a study (Heale & Twycross, 2015, as cited in Fang & Chalermirundorn, 2019). To ensure the validity of the research instruments, five experts, one from Rangsit University, Thailand and four from Bhutan (a Deputy Chief Program Officer/National

Training Commissioner from Bhutan Scout Association, a Principal/School Scouts Commissioner, a Regional Scout Coordinator/Scout Leader Trainer, and an Assistant Scout Leader Trainer) were involved in assessing the appropriateness. All 30 survey questionnaires and 6 semi-structured open-ended interview questions achieved a validity score of +1 based on five experts' validation, which means acceptable.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency and stability of test scores, reflecting the extent to which measurements are free from errors and capable of producing consistent results (Mohamad et al., 2015). The primary objective of conducting a reliability test is to identify potential issues and assess the effectiveness of the techniques or instruments before their application in the actual study. The reliability test results provide insights into possible limitations and indicate necessary modifications to enhance the study's accuracy (Hazzi & Maldaon, 2015).

Therefore, after the validation, the researcher administered a pre-survey to 42 Bhutanese Scout Leaders in another district of Bhutan. To test the reliability of the questionnaires, Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was used. A score of 0.70 or greater was considered to be acceptable as per Cronbach's Alpha scale. The Cronbach's Alpha (α) for the overall questionnaire was 0.99, which was excellent and indicated that the questionnaires were reliable for the study.

Data analysis

Survey questionnaires

The data gathered from the perspectives of BSLS and parents were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques with the help of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), a specialized software for statistical analysis. The analysis involved computing mean scores and standard deviations. The results were then interpreted according to the mean and standard deviation score ranges, considering a standard deviation range of less than or equal to 1.00 as indicating low variability.

Table 2 The Range of Mean Score Interpretation.

| Mean Score Range | Level of Agreement |
|------------------|--------------------|
| ≥ 4.50 | Highest |
| 3.50 – 4.49 | High |
| 2.50 – 3.49 | Moderate |
| 1.50 – 2.49 | Low |
| ≤ 1.50 | Lowest |

Source: Adapted from Denkar and Sakulwongs (2019)

Semi-structured interview

The analysis of semi-structured interviews with open-ended question responses provided a comprehensive understanding of the WSAS Program's roles and effectiveness in promoting the character

development of scouts in Bhutanese schools. Therefore, data collected from interviews were examined and interpreted using thematic analysis, which involved a systematic process of transcription, translation, coding, and synthesis.

Table 3 Mean score and standard deviation of the roles of the WSAS Program (n=324).

| Roles of WSAS Program | Administrator | | Teacher | | Support Staff | | Parents | | Overall Average | | Level of agreement |
|-----------------------|---------------|------|---------|------|---------------|------|---------|------|-----------------|------|--------------------|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | |
| Self-Discipline | 4.34 | 0.63 | 4.06 | 0.55 | 4.06 | 0.68 | 4.35 | 0.63 | 4.20 | 0.63 | High |
| Teamwork | 4.13 | 0.67 | 4.08 | 0.57 | 4.11 | 0.62 | 4.24 | 0.73 | 4.14 | 0.64 | High |
| Responsibility | 4.19 | 0.71 | 4.08 | 0.58 | 4.10 | 0.59 | 4.37 | 0.41 | 4.19 | 0.57 | High |
| Integrity | 4.03 | 0.64 | 4.04 | 0.60 | 3.99 | 0.58 | 4.30 | 0.70 | 4.09 | 0.63 | High |
| Loyalty | 4.15 | 0.66 | 4.07 | 0.57 | 4.06 | 0.64 | 4.35 | 0.68 | 4.16 | 0.63 | High |
| Resilience | 4.02 | 0.68 | 3.99 | 0.54 | 4.00 | 0.60 | 4.25 | 0.74 | 4.07 | 0.64 | High |
| Total mean and SD | 4.14 | 0.67 | 4.05 | 0.57 | 4.05 | 0.62 | 4.31 | 0.65 | | | |

Result analysis

Result Analysis of survey questionnaires on the roles of the WSAS program

The first objective of this study sought to explore the perspectives of BSLs and parents on the WSAS Program's roles in promoting character development among scouts. Parents reported the highest mean score ($M=4.31$, $SD=0.65$), followed by administrators ($M=4.14$, $SD=0.67$). The teachers ($M=4.05$, $SD=0.57$) and support staff ($M=4.05$, $SD=0.62$) reported slightly lower but still high scores. The Standard Deviations, ranging from 0.57 to 0.67, suggest moderate variation since a smaller SD reflects greater consistency of responses, while a larger SD reflects more variation, with teachers' responses most uniform and administrators' responses most variable. Variation

reflected differences in roles and experiences. Parents' observations were based on the program's impact at home. Administrators reflected based on school-level implementation differences, whereas teachers and support staff reflected based on their direct experiences, including both the strengths and challenges of the program in practice.

In ranking character traits, self-discipline ($M=4.20$, $SD=0.63$) was highest, followed by responsibility ($M=4.19$, $SD=0.57$), loyalty ($M=4.16$, $SD=0.63$), teamwork ($M=4.14$, $SD=0.64$), integrity ($M=4.09$, $SD=0.63$), and resilience ($M=4.07$, $SD=0.64$). Integrity and resilience, though slightly lower, remained within the high agreement range. Consistent SDs (0.57–0.64) indicated stable stakeholders' perspectives. Higher ratings for self-discipline and responsibility

reflected their reinforcement through structured scouting activities, whereas integrity and resilience were less immediately observable. These findings align with literature highlighting self-discipline and responsibility as foundational in character education (Lickona, 1991; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008).

Overall, the WSAS Program was perceived as an effective, value-driven approach for developing

essential character traits. High endorsement, particularly from parents, underscored its role in promoting both individual and collective development. The narrow SDs indicated strong stakeholder consensus, supporting the program's effective roles in promoting character development (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005).

Table 4 Mean score and standard deviation of the effectiveness of the WSAS Program (n=324).

| Effectiveness of WSAS Program | Administrator | | Teacher | | Support Staff | | Parents | | Overall Average | | Level of agreement |
|-------------------------------|---------------|-------|---------|------|---------------|------|---------|------|-----------------|------|--------------------|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | |
| Self-Discipline | 4.27 | 0.58 | 3.99 | 0.60 | 3.95 | 0.67 | 4.24 | 0.73 | 4.11 | 0.64 | High |
| Teamwork | 4.09 | 0.611 | 4.07 | 0.57 | 4.12 | 0.65 | 4.34 | 0.68 | 4.16 | 0.63 | High |
| Responsibility | 4.11 | 0.68 | 3.99 | 0.60 | 4.00 | 0.60 | 4.26 | 0.70 | 4.09 | 0.65 | High |
| Integrity | 4.03 | 0.74 | 3.92 | 0.57 | 3.93 | 0.69 | 4.17 | 0.78 | 4.01 | 0.70 | High |
| Loyalty | 4.11 | 0.67 | 4.01 | 0.54 | 4.00 | 0.66 | 4.24 | 0.74 | 4.09 | 0.65 | High |
| Resilience | 3.93 | 0.72 | 3.95 | 0.61 | 3.90 | 0.67 | 4.18 | 0.73 | 3.99 | 0.68 | High |
| Total mean and SD | 4.26 | 0.67 | 3.99 | 0.58 | 3.98 | 0.66 | 4.24 | 0.73 | | | |

Result analysis of survey questionnaires on the effectiveness of the WSAS program

The second objective of the study was to examine the perspectives of BSLs and parents on the effectiveness of the WSAS Program in promoting scouts' character development. The findings indicated strong and consistent agreement across respondents, with overall mean scores for the six core traits ranging from 3.99 to 4.16, reflecting a high level of agreement. Teamwork ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 0.63$) and self-discipline ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.64$) were the most strongly endorsed traits, followed by responsibility and loyalty (both $M = 4.09$, $SD = 0.65$), integrity ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 0.70$), and resilience ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 0.68$). The higher mean scores for teamwork and self-discipline were a reflection of their central emphasis and frequent reinforcement within the WSAS Program. Teamwork was cultivated through structured group activities, patrol systems, and collaborative projects, which require scouts to cooperate, share responsibilities, and support peers. Self-discipline was consistently promoted through the Scout Promise and Law, daily routines, leadership roles, and ceremonial observances, promoting punctuality, orderliness, and personal

accountability. Responsibility and loyalty were developed through assigned tasks, leadership duties, and commitment to school and community activities. Integrity emerged from ethical decision-making and adherence to the Scout Law, while resilience was shaped through experiential learning, such as public speaking, environmental projects, and problem-solving challenges, though opportunities to observe it consistently were less frequent. Overall, the ranking of these traits reflected the degree to which they were explicitly emphasized, practiced, and observed in scouts' daily activities.

When comparing overall group perceptions, administrators reported the highest mean ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.67$), followed closely by parents ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.73$), while teachers ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 0.58$) and support staff ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.66$) expressed slightly lower, yet still high, agreement. The small standard deviations indicate consistent responses within each group. The higher ratings from administrators and parents were a reflection of their broader, outcome-focused perspectives. The administrators, overseeing program implementation, recognized its alignment with school policies and observable impact on scouts' behavior and

character development, while parents, observing their children across multiple contexts, home, school, and community, perceived positive changes in behavior and values beyond school. In contrast, teachers and support staff engaged in daily activities directly with scouts were more attuned to practical challenges such as variations in scouts' engagement, resource limitations, policy fluctuations and workload burden, which contributed to slightly lower, though still high, ratings. In general, the results indicated that the WSAS Program was widely recognized as an effective, structured, and values-based framework for promoting key aspects of character development.

Result analysis of semi-structured interviews on the roles of the WSAS program

To enhance the reliability of the survey results, semi-structured interviews were conducted. A total of 46 participants, including both BSLs and parents, voluntarily participated in the interviews. The thematic analysis of face-to-face, open-ended, semi-structured interviews with BSLs and parents revealed that the WSAS Program had played a pivotal and multidimensional role in promoting character development among scouts. Respondents consistently highlighted that the program's structured, culturally embedded, and experiential nature was critical in promoting essential character traits such as self-discipline, teamwork, responsibility, integrity, loyalty, and resilience. The program effectively integrated Bhutanese spiritual and cultural principles, particularly Tha-Damtshig and Ley-Jumdrye (*Patriotism and Cause and Effect*), into daily school life through scouting activities such as leadership development, ceremonial observances, and community service. These practices were reported to have encouraged the development of punctuality, empathy, collaboration, civic responsibility, and ethical judgment, with respondents noting the transference of such behaviors into both academic and home settings. Additionally, mechanisms such as the patrol system, peer mentoring, symbolic rituals, and leadership rotations were perceived as instrumental in cultivating social and emotional competencies. Experiential learning engagements, including public speaking, environmental projects, and international exposure, were also seen to have enhanced scouts' resilience and adaptability. Overall, the findings

confirmed that the WSAS Program was widely regarded as an impactful and culturally relevant framework for promoting holistic character development rooted in Bhutanese values and real-world practice among scouts.

Result analysis of semi-structured interviews on the effectiveness of the WSAS program

The findings from semi-structured interviews with BSLs and parents revealed that the WSAS Program was widely perceived as highly effective in promoting character development. Stakeholders consistently affirmed the program's impact across core character traits, highlighting its alignment with Bhutan's holistic educational philosophy rooted in GNH. Respondents reported notable improvements in scouts' academic engagement, behavioral consistency, and accountability, attributing these outcomes to the program's structured routines, leadership roles, and values-based framework. The WSAS Program was also recognized for promoting collaboration, empathy, and civic responsibility through group activities and peer-led initiatives. Furthermore, stakeholders observed that scouts increasingly demonstrated ethical behavior, loyalty to institutional and national values, and the ability to navigate challenges with resilience and confidence. The continued guidance of Scout leaders, reflective practices, and integration of cultural values were considered critical in shaping these positive outcomes. Overall, the WSAS Program was regarded as a transformative and effective model for character education, promoting holistic, socially responsible, and morally grounded scouts.

Discussion

Interpreting WSAS outcomes through theoretical, cultural, and international perspectives

The WSAS Program played a significant role in promoting character development among scouts in Bhutanese schools, particularly in cultivating values such as self-discipline, teamwork, responsibility, integrity, loyalty, and resilience. Rather than reiterating descriptive findings, this discussion interprets how and why such outcomes emerged, framing them within theoretical perspectives, the Bhutanese cultural context, and international literature on character education and the whole-school approach.

From a theoretical standpoint, the program's structured and experiential design aligned closely with established educational models. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) validated the "learning by doing" methodology, emphasizing how reflective, hands-on activities advanced cognitive, emotional, and behavioral competencies (Kolb & Kolb, 2012). Bandura's Social Learning Theory (SLT) highlighted the role of observational learning and reinforcement, whereby Scout leaders and peers served as role models for prosocial behavior (Bandura, 1977, as cited in Nabavi & Bijandi, 2012). Likewise, Lickona and Davidson's Character Education Theory underscored the program's emphasis on moral knowledge, affective engagement, and ethical conduct (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (SDT) further explained how autonomy, competence, and relatedness supported intrinsic motivation and personal responsibility (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Taken together, these theories demonstrated that the WSAS Program provided a comprehensive platform for cultivating moral reasoning, civic responsibility, and resilience.

Equally significant was the integration of Bhutanese cultural and spiritual principles, including Tha-Damtshig (loyalty and sacred commitment) and Ley-Jumdrye (cause and effect), which grounded the program in Bhutan's unique socio-cultural context. These values reinforced the theoretical foundations of moral education by embedding ethical reasoning within the broader national philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH). Furthermore, the program's goals aligned with major policy frameworks such as Bhutan Vision 2020, the Constitution of Bhutan, and the Royal Kasho on Education Reform, all of which emphasized value-based education and the nurturing of socially responsible citizens (REC, 2014; RGoB, 2008, 2014, 2020).

Beyond its theoretical and cultural underpinnings, the WSAS Program operationalized a whole-school approach by engaging the wider school ecosystem through peer mentoring, patrol systems, leadership roles, and community service. This systemic design resonates with international literature, which demonstrates that embedding character education across curricula and school culture produces lasting improvements in social-emotional skills, ethical

behavior, and civic engagement (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Lickona & Davidson, 2005). Comparative evidence from Indonesia, Palestine, and Bhutan also supports the effectiveness of the scouting program in promoting discipline, empathy, cooperation, and social responsibility among youth (Soetopo, 2016; Subaidi et al., 2023; Ilmi et al., 2024; Nugraha et al., 2023; Tshewang & Duba, 2023; Wangchuk & Tshering, 2021). These connections positioned the Bhutanese context within broader international discourse, affirming the global relevance of WSAS-based character education.

Differences in perspectives between parents and BSLS revealed important nuances in assessing program outcomes. Parents frequently emphasized observable improvements in their children's behavior, confidence, and cooperation, often interpreting even modest changes as indicators of success. Conversely, BSLS evaluated the program through a professional lens, drawing attention to implementation challenges, workload pressures, and gaps between policy intentions and practical realities. While parental assessments were shaped by aspirations for their children's development, BSLS' judgments reflected managerial responsibilities and institutional constraints. This divergence illustrates how stakeholder roles and levels of engagement influenced perceptions of effectiveness.

On the whole, the WSAS Program emerged as a culturally grounded, school-wide model of character education that integrated theoretical frameworks, cultural values, and national policies with international best practices. By moving beyond descriptive outcomes to interrogate mechanisms of character formation, this study advances a deeper understanding of how scouting initiatives promote moral, emotional, and social competencies in contextually meaningful ways. The findings demonstrated how localized programs could both uphold Bhutan's national educational aspirations and contribute to global discourse on character education.

Conclusions

This study provided contextualized evidence that the WSAS Program significantly promoted character development among scouts in Bhutanese schools, particularly in Paro. Perspectives from BSLS and parents, supported by quantitative and qualitative data,

confirmed that the program effectively promoted core character traits through structured, culturally grounded, and experiential activities rooted in Bhutanese values such as *Tha-Damtshig* and *Ley-Jundrey* (*Patriotism, Cause and Effect*). These activities positively influenced scouts' behaviors within and beyond school.

Despite its success, implementation challenges included limited awareness, insufficiently trained personnel, inadequate time and incentives, and uneven institutional support. Teachers and staff often perceived the program as an added burden, while some parents raised concerns over balancing academics with scouting. Leadership transitions and resource constraints further hindered consistency. Addressing these challenges requires enhanced training, stronger institutional commitment, stakeholder collaboration, and adequate resources.

Holistically, the WSAS Program was widely recognized as a culturally resonant, policy-backed initiative aligned with Bhutan's GNH framework. It is not only an effective character education strategy but also a foundation for holistic youth development and nation-building (RGoB, 2008; REC, 2014). With sustained support from the MoE&SD and educational stakeholders, the WSAS Program could serve as a core element of Bhutan's national education strategy for cultivating ethically grounded, socially responsible youth.

Recommendations

Recommendations for implementation

To ensure the long-term sustainability and consistent implementation of the WSAS Program, it is recommended that the program be formally institutionalized across all school levels nationwide through a directive from relevant educational authorities. It is also recommended to enhance capacity building by introducing a structured system of regular refresher courses for Scout leaders, along with a more formalized scheme of recognition and incentives such as professional certification, career advancement, and performance-based rewards. Further to build greater stakeholder support, awareness of the educational significance of the WSAS Program is to be enhanced through targeted advocacy, structured orientation sessions, and integration into pre-service teacher education. Moreover, to alleviate perceptions among

teachers and support staff that scouting was an added burden, it is recommended that schools establish clear role assignments, allocate administrative support, incorporate scouting responsibilities into official workloads, and align program activities with academic goals to facilitate smoother integration.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future researchers may include perspectives from other districts and incorporate additional stakeholders, such as officials from the Bhutan Scouts Association, District Education Officers, and scouts themselves, to provide a more comprehensive and validated assessment of the WSAS Program. Using experimental or observational designs would further strengthen the credibility and reliability of the findings. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to evaluate the sustained impact of the WSAS Program on character development. Future studies may also examine the program's influence on other domains, such as physical, intellectual, social, emotional, and spiritual development, to capture a holistic understanding of its educational values and broader contributions to youth development in Bhutan.

Declaration of generative AI in scientific writing

The authors declare that generative AI tools (ChatGPT, Grammarly and DeepSeek) were used solely to improve language clarity and grammar during manuscript preparation. The authors reviewed and edited all AI-assisted text, and take full responsibility for the content of this article.

CRediT author statement

Dago Rinzin: Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Validation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Resources, Data Curation, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review & Editing, Visualization, Supervision, Project Administration. **Nipaporn Sakulwongs:** Overall advisor, Supervision, Project Administration. **Namkha Gyeltshen:** Data Curation, Resources, Writing – Review & Editing.

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